TOWN & COUNTRY POEMS

BY ARTHUR E. J. LEGGE

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TOWN & COUNTRY
POEMS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SUNSHINE AND SMOKE. A Book of Verse.

WIND ON THE HARPSTRINGS. Poems.

TOWN & COUNTRY

POEMS

BY

ARTHUR E. J. LEGGE

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TOWN AND COUNTRY POEMS

A CANTATA OF EXMOOR

I

'Tis an hour yet to noonday, and we ride
In a lane from pastures fenced on either side
By the battlements of beech, that crown the banks
With a wilderness of flowers on their flanks.

The morning dew lies wet upon the grass,
And distils from leaves above us, as we pass
In the shade of drooping branches that must be
The green banners of the Goddess Cybele.

For we seem to hear the cymbal and the drum
Of a corybantic chorus in the hum,
From a hidden stream that chatters on the stones,
With a wealth of tears and laughter in its tones.

And the laughter floats around us as we climb,
With the hoof-beats treading out a measured rhyme,
As the bridles faintly chink a steely thrill,
And the horses heave and scramble at the hill.

And at last we reach the summit and look back,
At the furrows of the steep and stony track,
As it bends through fern and timber to the gloom
In the soundless, dim recesses of the combe.

From that chamber comes at night the fairy-queen,
And the strip of turf before us, velvet green,
Guides her foot-steps to the brown and purple floor
Of her breezy, star-lit banquet-hall,—the moor.

But the sun is holding court in her domain,
With a throng of earthly guests to entertain,
And he bathes in molten gold our horses' feet
For a welcome, as we canter to the meet.

On a ridge amidst the heather and the furze
Is a sober-coloured mass that sways and stirs
Like the branches in a winter-blackened glen,
With a gleam of scarlet berries now and then.

The moorland faintly rings with every sound
In a harmony of man and horse and hound,—

Gruff voices, silvery laughter, and the crack
Of a whip recalling truants to the pack.

But the greetings and the gossip and reproofs
Seem to founder in a wave of trampling hoofs,
Bearing hounds, like foam that heads a tidal flow,
For the Master gives the signal,—and we go.

II

They have kennelled the pack
At a lonely farm-house, girt with a belt of trees
Broken and dwarfed by so many a panting breeze
That has yelled down the naked hill at the back
In the stormy winter nights ;
A place where the cold grey walls could tell
Of humble sorrows and plain delights,
And years lived out to their utmost span
In a course of labours rude,
For here, even here in the solitude,
There are souls that must open the book and spell
The faded riddles of life, and dwell
On the mystery of man.

But the riddles are all at rest,
And the line of our thought is clear of doubt,
For we know that the tufters are out,
And the huntsman is cantering over the crest
Of the rough bare hill, and evades our sight
In the depth of the combe ; we must linger here
While he toils with his deadliest craft to light
On the slot of the harboured deer.
So the mounted throng,
Like a Tartar horde on an Eastern out-post line,
Wanders vigilant along
The rounded slope, that drops a sharp incline
To the sunken valley's head,
With coarse and withered herbage carpeted.
And broken groups,
Halted at random amid heath and ling,
Form disconnected loops
In the long, bent string
Of riders stretching for a mile or more,
Who wait and watch, like wreckers gathering
In time of tempest on a rock-bound shore.

I gain a knoll some little space apart
From the changing ranks, and there dismount and lean
My arms upon the saddle, and across
My hunter's shoulder gaze upon a scene

That wrings from certain chords within my heart
A faint lament for our primæval loss.
For surely never out of Paradise
Have men for more than a brief moment been
In presence of such loveliness as here.
Draped in a thin blue veil of atmosphere,
Where pallid sunbeams twine like golden threads
Softly wrinkled and curved the moor-land lies,
A broad free tract of hills, whose rounded heads,
Fashioned with beauty simple and austere,
Delicate, almost unsubstantial seem,
A fairy landscape that our waking eyes
Could lose, perchance, like a dissolving dream.
And dream-like are the voices from below
Where storms and riots a turbulent stream
Rolling down to the valley by the Doone
Held in his lawless freedom long ago;—
Form, colour, and enchanted music blend
In airy, phantom harmonies that end
So soon—so soon.

III

Pardon us, pardon us, Badgeworthy Water!
Who blend with thine echoes a cruder note,
The horn's clear voice in a cry for slaughter,
The bell-tone pealed from the hound's rough throat.

A timorous rabble, the sheep are scaling
Tall, dark slopes by the sheerest path,
And a heron aroused from thy brink is sailing
High o'er the heather in stately wrath.

Thou art proud and petulant, Badgeworthy Water!
Thou callest thy confluent rills to thee,
Chiding and urging each foam-veiled daughter
To join in thy flight to the Severn Sea,
Wailing aloud for revenge to wreak on
The mists that should cloak thee in modest gloom,
With a curtain draped from Dunkery Beacon
To the brine and the boulders of Ilfracombe.

Dost thou hold with Artemis Badgeworthy Water,
That new Actæons should learn the price
Of a glance, repaid, as her anger taught her
By the hunter's appropriate sacrifice?
Thou wilt rather soften their doom, for pity
Of slaves that have come, for a moment free
From the fettering bonds of a tyrant city,
To be soothed by thine opiate harmony.

In the throng that troubles thee, Badgeworthy Water,
There are toilers bruised by the hand of Life,
With a long campaign that must yet be fought ere
The shadows come down on the field of strife.
And to them, fair stream, wilt thou prove the giver
Of memory's balm for a soul oppressed
By the haunting voice of a silvery river
Down in the combes of the dreamy West.

IV

Look! Look!
Where a tiny branching valley has made a break
In the front of the wall of grass uplifted sheer
From the gulf beneath us, a scarcely noticed nook
Of the bare brown bosom of moor,—is a tumbled bed
Of dark green pillows,—the top of a crust of trees;
And out on the open wold from the fringe of these,
Patching the brown with a moving flake of red,
Gallop the clustered deer.

Guessers compute them at half a hundred;
Eyes grow eager, and hopes are stirred
By the blood-beat dashed with only one dread
That, out of so large a herd,

Ere the stag that is doomed can be forced away
The stars will have smiled at our hunting-day.

We watch the flake of colour float
And with the back-ground blend, remote
In the transparent mist, and fade
Upon the blurred horizon's rim,
Where moist and salted airs have made
The washed-out upland faint and dim.
A gliding spot of scarlet tells
How the distant huntsman follows
His hounds that are speeding through the hollows
Carpeted with heather-bells,
And envious fancies fly to him
Posting away for a merry run
While our share of the sport remains to be begun.

But, after long waiting
And watchful debating,
The Master comes back
With a call for a pack,
For the moment draws near,
When the stage will be clear
And voices sonorous
Will open the chorus
Of fervent hound-melody, rhythmic and pure,
When the tufters have finished their overture.

We thunder down the valley,
And wade the surging ford,
By which the Doone would sally
To sweep with fire and sword
An undefended village,
And bear away the spoil
Of half a season's tillage
And half a hamlet's toil.
We herald no disaster,
Beneath no banner ride,
But, racing ever faster
Along the river-side,
The shaggy moorland ponies
In terror wheel and turn,
And bound like hunted conies
Over the yellow fern.
Amid the stony clatter
Of hoofs that toil and strain
We hear a magpie chatter
And a husky crow complain.
And, where the shepherd's cottage
Looks on the barren moor,
A sheep-dog in his dotage
Defies us from the door.

Again we halt unbidden,
Again the fierce lament
Trembles from voices hidden
Of hounds in durance pent.
But brief their loud insistence
On evils hardly borne,
For soon in mellow distance
Echoes a fairy horn,
That sets the valley humming
With each long-sounded blast,
For the welcome word is coming
And the stag is away at last.

V

Like an avalanche of Arabs on a toiling caravan,
When the riders open out across the plain
Till the turbans mark the desert with the pattern a fan,
And the war-cry of the Prophet and the thunder the clan
Rend the tomb of living silence once again,

We scatter o'er the heather-tufts, an earthquake at our feet,
And sweep the bending bracken down before us as we ride,
And whirl the brushing melody of wind amongst the wheat
Along the narrow-bottomed combe and up the further side.
The blowing horses labour on the surface of the hill,
While the hounds have topped the summit and are gone.
But a goat upon the mountains would be conquered by the skill
That leads us to the level where we gallop as we will,
And again we follow on—follow on!
There's a brief ecstatic rush along the broken table-land,
When the bridle sways and tightens to the pressure of your hand,
And your horse's motion tells you of the passions that have run
To a stream of subtle sympathy, and welded you in one.

The riven air whose buffet brings the moisture of a tear
To your eye-lid makes amend with an intoxicating draught,
And the vague, uncanny music that it whispers in your ear
Has the chime of ghostly mirth in it, as though a spirit laughed.
The drunken hills are rocking and the clouds in Heaven reel;
Amidst a roaring cataract of gallopers you feel
That you own no domination save the phrenzy of a thirst
To see the chase and keep your place and ride among the first.

But we check the lathered horses for a moment at the brink
Of another yawning, wooded gulf, where trees become as toys,
So distant are the depths we pause to measure ere we sink
Among the matted branches, with our brains in equipoise

On the course of Nature's cunning; but the doubt
dissolves again
When slanting up the further slope the foremost
hounds appear,
We must follow them that reckoned how the stag
would plead in vain
For the Dryads of the grove to give him sanctuary
here.

Eluded thus by Time,
We face the downward climb,
With feet that toil on yielding soil and lichen-coated
roots,
The horses plunge and scramble
Through chains of twining bramble,
And crush the seedling oaks to earth and snap the
elder shoots.
We slide upon a bed
Of cone and needle shed
From branches o'er a temple never open to the day,
In a pinewood-pillared hall
Where the faintest echoes fall
From the murmur of the pigeon and the shrieking of
the jay.
In the chill of vapours dank
Are the nettles growing rank,

And we scent the mouldy fungus and the sickly, mellow breath
Where moist corruption weaves
New matter from the leaves
On the loom that's never idle in the factories of Death.
But again the sunbeams glow
When we reach the turf below,
And we gallop by the water-way beyond the little bridge;
As a file of ants would crawl
On a sunny garden-wall
We thread the narrow shelf that lifts the roadway to the ridge;
We cross the purple crown
Of highland rolling down
Towards a gray, mysterious blank, where nothing seems to be;
Till on the brink we halt
And view the gaping vault
Where depths of liquid vagueness dim the sparkle of the sea.

With brains that yet are reeling we stoop to look below,
Where distant voices pealing suggest a mortal fray
For hounds we cannot reach there attempt the final throw,
And down upon the beach there the stag's at bay.

I range into the hollow whose curve abruptly bends
The line of cliff, and follow a roadway coiling steep
Beneath the wooded shoulders and bosom, ere it ends
Smothered by massive boulders at the margin of the deep.
A wave of blind compunction forbids my further course
To view the tragic function inevitable now,
So I turn among the bushes to where some hidden force
From the rock-surface pushes a rough, projecting brow.
And there, with senses lazy, I let the bridle fall
And watch the headlands hazy beyond the shrouded sea,
And listen, softly dreaming, when the grey gulls call,
As I watch their feathers gleaming in the void that's under me—
Till, breaking through the glamour on my drowsy spirit cast,
The far but cruel clamour swells skyward, and I hear
The whoop of triumph blending with the horn's long blast
To hail the gallant ending of a warrantable deer.

VI

Where the pale road gleams like a riband through the heather,
By the dust edged white as a line of frozen foam,
While chance has gathered groups of two or three together,
O'er the great brown vista we are riding home.

In a purple shadow are the lower summits hooded,
And the dusk goes down upon each solitary combe,
Where the vague, dark banks of a river, barely wooded,
Are the curlew's haunt, as it cries amid the gloom.

Oh land that I love ! as a woman's, pure and tender,
Is thy grave, sweet gaze for the hearts that come and go,
And wreathed in the light of her spiritual splendour
Are thy bare brows gleaming in the sunset glow.

Let me find thee a word of gratitude for giving
To a soul that has looked for a refuge unto thee,
The rare, glad sense of the miracle of living,
The leap of the blood learning what it is to *be*.

Mother of men! For the children thou dost cherish,
For the wholesome hearts that are beating over thine,
For the clean, good ways thou wilt suffer not to perish,
And the rustic warmth of the welcome that is mine,

For the nameless charm of thy soft bewitching beauty,
For the healing of the airs that o'er thy bosom roll,
I would gage my troth for a life of lover's duty,
I would crown thee a queen in the kingdom of my soul.

VAGABONDS

The roaring tide of life has tossed
Dim fragments of discoloured surf,
(God's image, frayed, degraded, lost,)
Here on the greasy trampled turf.

The sun-light of a summer day
Smiles on each piteous human heap
Of rags and foulness and decay,
Of bestial sloth, besotted sleep.

And all the sober, decent throng
Approaching turn their steps aside,
To show the watchful world how strong
Their self-respect, their seemly pride.

And, here and there, a roaming child
Is summoned by a frightened nurse
To leave the strip of grass defiled
By vagrants, beggars, thieves, or worse.

And Nature only shows no fear
Of contact with the nameless clan,
Finding some bond of kinship here
With those that bear the scorn of man.

For human progress, growth, and gain
Have stripped her of her ancient dress,
And fettered with a formal chain
Her wild and savage loveliness.

Her faded blue, her withered green,
Her pallid shades of sickly brown,
Proclaim her throned, a tattered queen,
Among these out-casts of the town.

And I, who walk convention's way,
And rank with men of good report,
Know well that I should rightly pay
My homage in her lawless court.

For though I speak the shibboleth,
And wear the badge, and play the *rôle*,
I fain would breathe a deeper breath,
And take their trappings from my soul.

Oh children of an outlawed race!
Oh ye who spurn the social bribe
Of man's esteem! I ask a place
Upon the record of your tribe.

I do not shirk the sober task,
Nor scorn the cold, mechanic play,
And scarcely drop my rigid mask
Save for a fleeting holiday.

But though a forced recruit I tread
The barrack-yard, wild fancies fill
Most mutinous my shameful head,
And desecrate the solemn drill.

And all my truant thoughts escape
From toil and pleasure's laboured stress,
And pass the curtained dreams that drape
The fairy world of idleness.

And forth they steal, a gipsy band,
To learn what lies beyond the bars,
To shed their cumbrous clothes, and stand
In naked truth beneath the stars;

To take the simple code and creed
That rules in meadow, glade, or bower,
The morals of the bursting seed,
The fashions of the opening flower.

To taste of all the fruits that grow,
To drink of every stream that runs,
To let the worldly payment go,
And own no mintage, save the sun's.

To rove at will a wide domain
Of heath and woodland, down and lea,
The broad white road, the crumpled lane,
The rough bare links beside the sea.

And though the bugle calls me back
To starch and pipe-clay, belt and glove,
To walk once more the hardened track,
And keep the laws I do not love,

I earn the wage, and act the part,
And still pretend its falseness true,
And mortgage all, except the heart
That glides, my brothers, back to you!

LA GRANDE DAME

A BLOCK in the road-way checked your wheels
  At the pavement's edge for a passing minute,
And I turned for the look that an idler steals
When a carriage's blazoned pomp reveals
  The power and pride of the woman in it.

By the lazy, lounging, insolent air,
  And the scornful face, with its touch of passion;
By the cold proud eyes, and the distant stare
That proclaimed you had neither thought nor care
  For sojourners out of the pale of fashion;

By the liveried slaves and the gilded crest
  And coronet stamped on the painted panels,
Was the story told and the name confessed
Of a line that can trace its seal impressed
  Far back on the world's recorded annals.

Oh deathless type of a race that sprung
From the proud and pitiless queen of Heaven!
Semiramis spoke in your mother-tongue;
On the walls that arose when Amphion sung
Your lovers withstood the besieging Seven;

In the streets where the phrensied Jonah prayed
That the Lord would come with his promised slaughters,
He passed you;—Many a Hebrew maid
Softened your dreams with the notes that strayed
From her harp by the Babylonian waters;

Fair Athens wove you a violet crown
When the sages joined in their strife Platonic;
You basked in the warmth of some sunny town
Where cypress and vine went straggling down
To the boulders fretted by waves Ionic.

But on Tiber's shore was your happiest home,
And your footprints clear on a path of glory
May be followed through many a faded tome,
Where the hands by whose toil we remember Rome
Have painted the dye of your purple story.

In the lurid lava your heart was hurled
Of conquest, passion, and regal pleasure ;
You governed the giants who ruled the world ;
You played with a soul, while your locks were curled,
And whispered its doom in your languid leisure.

In the circle that bounded the blood-stained sand,
Where the warm light gleamed on your jewelled vesture,
You would gaze at the gladiatorial band,
Till a swordsman fell,—and you raised your hand
And ordered his fate with a careless gesture.

To the springs of voluptuous life you went,
And drank of the waters that daze and dull us ;
You gambled with hearts till the stock was spent,
For your smile was Ovid in banishment,
And your treacherous favours killed Catullus.

Have you greatly altered, I wonder, now
When the world seems far from its old conditions ?
Do you deafen your ears to a lover's vow ?
Were the faint lines stamped on that stately brow
By different fancies, new ambitions ?

I should guess that at heart you are much the same,
Though your force flows out in a modern channel;
Though the lists of charity bear your name,
Though hospital sufferers eat your game,
And elderly paupers wear your flannel.

For your footsteps cling to a narrow line,
Whatever your bearing,—staid or sinful,—
On the daintiest dishes of life you dine,
But you shrink from a draught of its strongest wine.
And turn from the topers who take their skinful.

And you watch with an undiscerning gaze
The clamorous throng of your toiling neighbours,
And follow your fashions and end your days
With no thought of the riddle of Nature's ways,
Or the world's reward for its griefs and labours.

And yet, though you dwell in a sphere apart
Where life is a game,—and the players skilful,—
Though you seem but a product of finest art,
There is one true thing,—just a woman's heart
Tender and mutinous, warm and wilful.

And it keeps a small spot in the desert green,
And sweetens the strength of your highest virtue,—
The courage that crowns you a rightful queen,
That has conquered the stake and the guillotine
And laughed at the power of death to hurt you.

Reformers would show you a frowning face,
And the envious offer reproof pedantic,
But I deem, if their levelling hands erase
From the world's wide canvas your scornful grace,
The picture will lose by a touch romantic.

Though my vision be far from your point of view,
And I look not on life as it seems to strike you,
Nor rate you, perhaps, as you think were due,
Yet I fancy your metal rings more true
Than much in this world of shams.—I like you.

SOMNAMBULISM

Swans on the river under the brown-topped Autumn
woods,
Grey, moving water, calm as the sheet of an idle
mere,
Hills cloaked in mist like kneeling nuns with their
sombre hoods,
No sound but the muffled roar from the ridge of the
foaming weir.

Surely we wander now at the fringe of the veil of
sleep,
Nearing the shadowy zone around the world of
night!
When, when shall we snap the cord that chains us
dreaming deep,
And break from this tardy swoon to the deathless
dome of Light?

ELIJAH'S MANTLE

THERE on the shelf your volumes stand
For unrecorded time to rust them,
Save when the housemaid's marring hand
Misplaces and pretends to dust them.

Yet once you freely sold your wares,
And ranked as an important poet,
And gave yourself the usual airs
To let your little circle know it.

Your lines were quoted, even read,
And served to show how sages quarrel
When critics wrote, while round your head
A grateful ruler wreathed the laurel.

And though, like smaller men, you died,
It seemed that ere you passed the portal
Your hours of learned toil supplied
Matter to make your name immortal.

Yes, it survives you—on your tomb.
The harvests of your brain encumber
A shelf in that deserted room
Where the world stores its mental lumber.

The fact that once you lived will be
Divulged through most unworthy media,
A page in some anthology,
A note in an encyclopedia.

Your vogue has passed, and younger wines
Adorn the Dilettante's table,
Bottled from all the choicest vines
Grown on Parnassus. (See the label !)

And new performers wake the lyre
By visionary hopes deluded,
Thinking to fan the sacred fire
More fervently than ever you did.

Your methods die. The later Muse
Bows to the judgment granted cheaply
By demi-gods, who write reviews,
And know so much, and think so deeply.

Like all around, the modern Bard
Displays the force of evolution,
And problems you considered hard
He reckons easy of solution.

Be comforted! He holds the stage,
But acts a part whose end is certain;
While briefly now the plaudits rage,
Soon follow silence and the curtain.

For though with faultless art he turns
Sonnet and rondel, ode and ballad,
He'd use the midnight oil he burns,
With equal gain to dress a salad.

He cultivates a polished style
To yield his thoughts a fitting casket,
And Fame, with a sardonic smile,
Throws them in her waste-paper basket.

But sky-ward ever points his wing;—
Perhaps I ought to use the plural,
For now so many poets sing
Their music may be classed as choral.

They beat upon their prison bars,
And burn their little waxen tapers,
Which often are accounted stars
By prophets of the daily papers.

And some, to catch the public ear,
Adopt the tone a trifle blatant
Of the commercial chanticleer
Who crows about the pill that's patent.

They don whatever garb attracts
From any fool the least attention,
And boast of little dirty facts
That common folk would scorn to mention.

And cheapen Art's immortal name,
And posture as inspirèd sinners,
And play the old pathetic game
Where bubble crowns reward the winners.

But some are satisfied to wear
The mien of gentlemen and scholars,
To make no symphony of hair
No idyl of cravats and collars.

From Fancy's garden they collect
And hive within their verse the honey
Of reticence and self-respect,
That foil the lures of praise or money.

But soon or late for each and all
The Hand will press the shears within it,
And let the skeins they sunder fall,
A century, an hour, a minute.

The stoutest flag by Time is furled,
What heart will glow with recognition
Even of Shakespeare when the world
Has faded to the Moon's condition?

We are some greater Poet's dream ;
The gossamer of human glory
Is spun for a dissolving scheme
And woven through an idle story.

Life rings the long recurring change
Of flower to seed and seed to flower,
And Wisdom finds no further range
From Solomon to Schopenhauer.

Then wherefore ask an empty name
Or shun the feast of loaves and fishes?
When all the copy-books proclaim
The vanity of human wishes.

And watchmen self-appointed stand
To pour cold water pedagogic,
From pumps of learning second-hand,
In loosely-tinkered pails of logic,

On every lone poetic spark
That youthful passion strives to kindle,
Though the dim world be growing dark
And distant beacons pale and dwindle.

They vow that all the songs are sung,
That all the warbler's eggs are addled,
That only when the world was young
Could Pegasus be safely saddled.

But others may presume to hold
That half the mournful things they tell us,
Are but the fruit of being old,
Or very dull, or rather jealous.

Over the rolling waste of years
Has Man, the hoary pilgrim, blundered,
And fought with agonies and fears,
And asked the way, and wept and wondered.

He treads an Alpine pathway veiled
In fogs of nescient gloom ; or paces,
By passion's burning heat assailed,
Into the lonely desert places.

His hair is damp with tearful rain
Or white with frozen doubt encrusted ;
On crags of grief he learns how vain
The hold of hope to which he trusted.

Bewildered, weary, breathless, blind,
He thinks each day to clutch to-morrow
That Jack-o'-lantern joy behind
The marsh-born mist of pain and sorrow.

But when he walks on higher ground,
Just as his threadbare faith is failing,
He hears a wild, Æolian sound
Of distant music o'er him wailing ;

And for a moment he forgets
The bitter lot his tribe inherits,
And, turning up the mountain, sets
His face towards the land of Spirits,

And looks for words to fit the throng
Of fancies from that music flowing,
And makes a little plaintive song,
And hums the burden, hardly knowing.

And though with resolution spent,
And courage unconstrained to rally,
He droops upon the steep ascent
And falters down into the valley.

Yet through his cowed and conquered soul
He feels that fairy music throbbing,
And voices, half-coherent, roll
The song he made amidst their sobbing.

And lightened is the gravest load,
And sweetened the severest labour,
And, as the song goes down the road,
Each drooping heart salutes a neighbour.

So long as earthly eyes are dim
And earthly brains with anguish burning,
Voices will chant the human hymn
Of jaded hope and helpless yearning.

Though here our ancient music dies,
Out of the world's forgotten places
Soon will the Interpreter arise
To mould the dream of coming races.

Till his great organ-pipe shall blow
We'll tune our humble penny-whistles
And hope that all the seed we sow
Shall not be lost among the thistles.

If Fortune, with disdainful smirk,
Amid her wards refuse to rank us,
We still may do some honest work,
And here and there a heart will thank us.

Voltaire provides a useful text,
Who bids you cultivate your garden
When by this foolish world perplexed;—
But wherefore preach? I beg your pardon!

ILLUMINATION

Out of the sunbeams cometh a boat
  Gliding down the river,
Like a thought that threadeth a hazy dream,
Or the bark of Hope on a silent stream
Where the froth and the bubbles of Fancy float
  And the lights of Memory quiver.

The sun out-stretcheth a flaming sword
  Till the pearly waters sheath it,
And the land withdraweth her veil of mist,
Baring her mouth and eyes to be kissed,
Aglow in the smile of her radiant Lord,
  But ah! there are tears beneath it.

THE UNSEEN SINGER

Crowned with a yellow cluster
  Of lamps whose jewelled bars
Contrast their garish lustre
  With the dim light of the stars,
The street lies choked and throbbing
  In the furnace-breath that moans
With a wail of muffled sobbing
  O'er the haunted paving-stones.

Through a hazy cloud of curtain
  A pallid shaft of light
Threads with a gleam uncertain
  The obscure and shapeless night;
And, beyond, a sweet voice lingers
  As it bends with liquid ease
To the dance of nimble fingers
  Tripping light upon the keys.

No great musician's magic
Adorns the humble rhyme,
No burden of the Tragic,
No wave of the Sublime ;
But a flash of human feeling
Seems to filter through the gloom,
In melody revealing
The load of earthly doom.

It asks the plaintive query
Of uneventful lives,
Of the spinsters old and weary
And the leaden-hearted wives,
Of voices that have spoken
And voices that are dumb,
Of the promise always broken,
And the days that never come.

PRIMROSE DAY

Ropes of pale yellow blossom wreathed and twined
O'er the stone pedestal whereon they bind
Rich garlands of remembrance, underneath
The silent effigy that mocks at Death
With its own smile. The chiselled features wear
That grave, inscrutable, ironic air
Caught from their living model. Kindly art
Perpetuates the Actor's favourite part
Of brooding, sphynx-like dreamer. Ah, who knows
How much that graven face conceals or shows
Of what the man's true soul was? Right or wrong
Faith finds no shadow in the pilgrim throng
Heaving and humming on the pavement here,
And brightening the hueless atmosphere
With tufts of that good flower the fresh sun makes
From fragile gossamer of his first flakes
Of pallid gold,—a chord that seems to wring
Our hearts with the faint passion of the Spring.

The true believers gather at the shrine,
Touching exemplars of the thirst divine
That leads men with insatiable fire
To look for something they can love, admire,
Honour with incense-fumes or breath of flowers,
Credit with sacred wisdom, god-like powers,
A light to flash one beam of an ideal
Into the turbid waters of the real.

Here for a space the apostle of Finance
Forgets to follow the delirious dance
Of names and figures, while his thought expands
To dream of statesmanship, and foreign lands,
Eruptive movements among stocks and shares,
And Armageddon of the Bulls and Bears.
The plump suburban tradesman at his side
Swells with a greater than parochial pride,
Feeling that, ere the hand of time shall rub
The gloss from England's fame, his local club
Will raise a storm whereat the world would quake
And even vestrymen might lie awake.
A brown-faced soldier comes, erect and grim,
To cast a stern approving look on him
Whose life at least was fearless. Meekly proud,
A country vicar elbows through the crowd,

Just from his quiet parsonage, wherein
Faint and few sounds are echoed of the din
Of party strife, and years have passed away
Absorbed with care of poultry, garden, hay,
Funerals and christenings, and friends to tea,
And now and then the Bishop;—this was he
Whose word *made* Bishops! Fashionable dames,
Oblivious of absorbing social claims,
Prattle of moments when they helped the Cause,
Burned with excitement, joined in the applause
For brilliant speeches made by nice young men
Who found their eyes inspiring, scarce could pen
The emotion wafting patriotic fumes
Through Paris hats and heavenly costumes.
Countless the types and classes, countless too
The opinions stirred, the changing points of view;
Some hostile, some indifferent, but most
Breathing harmony warm; perhaps the ghost
Of envious admiration flits across
Some youthful dreamer's brain; if chance could toss
His boat in such wild waters, yet allow
Anchorage safe for his victorious prow
At last quiet in harbour, who shall say
That *any* steersman will not find the way?
Flaming, perchance, the lamp of hope revives
Here in some few narrow, laborious lives.

Oh silent figure with the moulded mask,
Unveil your secret! When our children ask
How shall we answer, estimating you?
A greasy-ringleted, bedizened Jew,
Wearing the brand and birth-mark of your race
In every line of that mysterious face,
Sprung from the bosom of a class that strives
To make its blameless vegetable lives
Bear interest at more than market rates
Here, and beyond the gulf of Heaven's gates,
You strode into the arena; long and fierce
The cut and thrust, the nimble carte and tierce;
Against you scorn, ridicule, hatred, pride,
Tradition, prejudice, and on your side
Unfailing self-reliance, self-esteem,
Courage and foppery intertwined to dream
Queer, shrewd romantic fancies, unexpressed
Save in wild metaphor or florid jest,
Yet weighted with a purpose. Friendly Time
Brought you your triumph; figure half sublime,
Half comic, all of empire, save the crown,
You won to your dominion, looking down
With your old solemn irony when they,
Who knew your power, to curse or to obey,
Sang of your glories, shouted of your crimes,
Hailed you as prophet, teacher, seer, at times,

Then quickly dubbed you traitor, mountebank
Charlatan, God knows what,—when rose and sank
The fluctuating tide, you seldom spoke
Without the flavour of a cynic joke
Vaguely seasoning your words.

Who can tell
How far your mood was earnest? Long and well
You worked for England. Would the work prove more
Of value if the worker's manner wore
That conscious air of spiritual worth
With which we love to tread the ways of Earth?
Or can we blame you if your Eastern wit,
Finding our Western broad-cloth hardly fit
To clothe its mockery, was so often moved
To wear a garb of fustian? Is it proved
That when Time writes this old world's epitaph
The grave will bear more legend than a laugh?
How test we truth? Before your sculptured eyes
The fane wherein so many a statesman lies,
In honoured peace among our honoured dead,
Rears to the London gloom its lofty head,
A witness for the Faith your people spurned.
O'er the dark earth a beacon-light, has burned

That Faith for centuries; the Cross has grown
Into a watch-word; not by priests alone,
But on the lips of almost all who lead
This modern world, the music of the creed
Owns the Rejected of your race, who taught
That earthly hopes, aims, dreams, desires are nought,
That man should scorn luxury, power, and wealth,
Count all men brothers, doing good by stealth,
Shrink from the gold with which the world allures,
Thankful for every failure he endures,
Labour and love as loves and labours—who?
By Heaven, we scarcely need to ask of you
Why the faint, lurking irony should haunt
Yon statue's mouth!

And yet there is no taunt,
No gibe at mortal weakness ambushed there;
Rather, I hold, the humorous despair,
The mocking pity of a great wise brain
That pierces to the heart of human pain
And impotent delusion. There are tears
Under the laughter bred by public years
Of toiling life. In yonder Senate-house
You saw the solemn throes that yield the mouse
From mountains in their labour; you beheld
Ideals broken, youthful ardours quelled,

The windy passion of each rival school,
The pathos of the plodding, earnest fool,
The woeful skein of tangled truth and lies
Apparent when the cloudy conscience tries
To weave her shapeless thoughts upon the loom
Of words; you felt the thunder-tramp of doom
Marching on all.

Ah me! When Wisdom weighs
The fruit of diligently guarded days,
Watches the working of a noble brain
Through the long labyrinth of wasteful pain,
Sees how man slowly climbs towards the goal
Of self-accomplishment and self-control,
And how, the battle being almost won
And life—sane, reasonable life—begun,
Death frees the passage of a single dart
And there is nothing!—Wisdom draws apart
From the grave council, drops the sober gown,
Snatches a bauble from the nearest clown,
Drapes a disguising domino, and slips,
Hooded in laughter, out of jesting lips.

THE SEA-SPELL

Lave me, bathe me, and bear me on,
  Luminous water where sunlight swims
Whenever its whitening gold has gone
  Through the pale green veil to my naked limbs.

For I have embodied the sun-beams now;
  In a liquid silver my hair is wet;
And each wave, as I scatter it, marks my brow
  With the pearls of a foam-wreathed coronet.

I am passion and power and life and joy;
  My frame, as it fills with each long salt breath,
Turns spirit, escaped from the last alloy
  Of the flesh that encumbered,—the garb of death.

Body and soul have been shaped anew,
  From the kind sea born in a regal birth,
Suffused with the sky's imperial blue,
  And shedding the dolour and dust of earth.

I am lord and conqueror, riding free
On the neck of the billows that shake their manes
As they plunge to the infinite open sea
And gallop at large o'er the blue-green plains.

I am an anchorite fondly wooed
By the charm of a stainless atmosphere,
By the voice that appeals from the solitude
For the brooding senses to wake and hear,

By the boundless eloquent calm of thought,
By the wonderful peace of a perfect trust,
By the fierce, wild freedom slowly wrought
From the clamour of pain and the load of lust.

I am a watcher who scans the night,
Reading the courses of moon and stars,
Till the paths of Heaven are all alight
With the old great Gods in their shining cars.

I am a scholar who climbs alone
To the peaks of a mental mountain-chain,
With vision unfoiled by the shadows thrown
From the crags beneath on the dusky plain,

Gaining the music that no man hears,
The splendour that others have died to see,
The fiery maze of the curving spheres
And the hum of their crooning harmony.

I am a lover who kneels at last
In a Holy of Holies, where the flame
Of the altar burns in a furnace-blast
The poison of doubt and the dregs of shame,

Till, purged and hallowed, the flesh completes
The mystical rite of the melting soul,
And the throb of a purest passion beats
Like a drum for the triumph of lives made whole.

I am colour and melody, art and song;
I cloister with knowledge and soar with truth;
A glittering bubble I float along
On the seething tide of eternal youth.

For strange are the dreams that mine eyes behold,
And magic the fancies that come to me
As I swim through the beaten belt of gold
Where the sun-light swoons on the foaming sea.

IN A POLICE-COURT

THROUGH unwashed glass within a dusty casement,
On the bare desert of discoloured walls
Darkened with memories of man's abasement,
The dim light falls.

Here is the shop where Justice, queen of tinkers,
Toils when the social harness shows a flaw,
Buckles the girth afresh and binds the blinkers
With brazen law.

Here, day by day, Propriety's defaulters
Offer atonement at her sacred shrine,
Victims on that least worshipful of altars
Reckoned divine.

Where is the world we lived in for a season,
That nurtured laughter, beauty, love, and hope?
With the foul puzzle that befogs our reason
We cannot cope.

Surely we dream ;—some night-mare phrenzy traces
These awful pictures burned upon the brain,
These cunning, cruel, spirit-soddened faces,
These masks of pain.

The savage mockery that stings and blisters
Worked on the mould from which these models broke.
Men, see your brothers ; women, view your sisters ;—
Hell's playful joke !

Subtle, indeed, the humour that selected
These paltry scapegoats from the kindred flock,
Standing unblamed, unbranded, unsuspected,
Outside the dock.

Humorous, too, the processes mechanic
Of clockwork constables, who print the scenes
Lurid with violence and shame and panic,
Like type-machines.

And, almost conscious of the jest ironic,
The suave attorney pleads a doubtful claim ;
With hirèd warmth and pathos histrionic
He plays the game.

But first and best comedian in the drama
Figures the grave presiding potentate,—
A paste-board Jupiter,—a true Grand Llama,—
The Magistrate.

Poor man!—Well-clothed, well-nourished, and well-meaning,
He labours here to practise and to preach
The comfortable world's own gospel, leaning
Lame thought on speech.

Sustained by pompous phrases that he treasures,
He drives round pegs into the squarest holes;
With pious industry he weighs and measures
The worth of souls.

He brands the losers and rewards the winners,
Never suspecting that his own good rules
Might claim himself to rank among the sinners
Or with the fools.

From human motives, when he plies the bellows,
Are hammered iron formulæ, whose test
Repairs a few among his damaged fellows,
And spoils the rest.

Oh human hearts!—when hope has failed and fainted,
Here is a type to raise your thoughts above;
For much like *him* men's prophecies have painted
Their God of Love!

CHALLENGE

Grey days of gloom,
That fold your sombre wings about my soul,
Are you the darkness of advancing doom,
The pale, sad messengers of mist that roll
O'er the mouth of the tomb,
Screening the gulf of open jaws agape
To gather in the whole
Of life and hope and happiness,
The end of the path poor human feet must press
Nor I escape?

Even should this be so,
Here will I speak!
I am tired of my long labour, faint and weak;
I scarce could count it banishment to go
Into an everlasting silence, free
From work or woe,

Yet scorn the coward thought that came to me!
No pause from toil, no comfortable death.
But life and action call me;—I *am* life;
Whether or no the changing æons bring
An end to the strife,
I am going on. I shall master everything.

Ah, hostile shadows frowning in my way!
Your purpose cannot daunt me; when you fall
Across my path I shrink not, knowing well
That I can conquer all.
For there is nothing found in fabled Hell
So strong as is the power within me,—force
Unseen and uninterpreted, yet moving
On the appointed course,
Perpetually proving
That One Thing speaks alone,—and all obey.

I take you—care,
Pain,—sorrow,—disillusionment,—despair,—
As artists take their colours, and from you
I paint my picture. Life is what I will.
I make the legends live, the dreams come true.
We are ourselves a legend and a dream,
Notes of an organ touched with perfect skill
By an unknown Hand,

And blended in a stream
Of harmony we may not understand,
Yet have to govern as it rolls along,
For we are both the Singer and the Song.

Slowly I toil towards the sky-topped crest
Of Understanding, and awake to see
How the dim vapours have been fooling me
With their illusions on the mountain's breast.
This poor, blind, bounded personality,
Doomed for some years to suffer,—then to die,
I thought was I!
But now the prospect broadens; I am learning
The genesis of my peculiar spark
Flashed out of the universal fire, burning
Through the great frame of life: and though the dark
Surround me still,
Faint gleams of light returning
Grant hopes of vision higher on the hill.

We have lost the creeds
To which men clung
With helpless anguish when all hearts were young,
Asking a balsam for their aching needs
That burned and stung,
Searching in vain for flowers amid life's weeds.

With a wider hope
And a braver trust
We check the childish whimper for our Nurse
To lead us through the gloom wherein we grope,
Nor waver o'er the better and the worse,
But take with open eyes the path we must,
Knowing forsooth that this necessity,
In some mysterious way,
Is our own work; we who perforce obey
Its iron law have made that law to be.

For through this great, sad puzzle there is throbbing
A sense of clearer thought, of growing light.
I hear the human ocean sobbing
Down on the jagged rocks beneath the night.
The note that jarred seems to have faded now,
As the symphony swells,
While the vague burden of the truth it tells
Loses that old discordant "Why?" and "How?"
But one recurring motive threads the strain,
Sounding a lofty mood
Far above transient throes of joy or pain,
Of virtue recompensed or guilt pursued,
And all the worthless little hopes and fears
That roused or calmed our tears.

We are the seething bubbles of a river,
Sometimes in shade,
At others lit by the golden beams that quiver
On the giant flood wherefrom the film was made
That forms our personality; complete
And yet not wholly severed; always part
Of the one great stream.
When our idle dream
Ends, and the bubbles burst, no longer beat
Harsh hands at the door of the universal heart.
With our false life go
Ephemeral shapes of evil, pain, and woe.
Still does that everlasting river flow
To the distant sea
Of sole Reality,—
Love?—Beauty?—God?—It lies so faint and far
We may but wonder what its waters are.

MY DAY

Though your brief passion may be lulled to sleep,
Dooming my life to tread a lonely way,
There will be yet one memory to keep;
I had *my* day.

Though you should sing for other ears than mine,
Still must the haunting harmonies belong
To him who felt them in his blood like wine;
I heard *your* song.

Though time shall strip my heart's deserted walls,
Take, one by one, his early gifts away,
These will be with me when the curtain falls;—
Your song, *my* day.

THE MOORLAND AND THE WOODLAND

Said the Moorland to the Woodland, "I am weary, Love, without thee,
And I hearken for the music that is born among thy boughs.
I ask the gentle western breeze to fold his wings about thee,
And whisper in thy ear the burning murmur of my vows.
But I know the gods have laid us in our solitudes asunder,
And I fear thy thoughts are flying to a fairer, dearer land,
And beneath my misty curtain I can only dream and wonder
If you feel the far-off throbbing of my heart, and understand."

Said the Moorland to the Woodland, "I am wild and
bare and barren ;
I have nought but heather, purple with the life-
blood of my breast,
Where the hungry foxes prowl and, here and there,
the rabbits warren,
And the lonely curlew wails and wavers homeward
to her nest.
I know that thou hast flowers to give thee perfumes
at thy pleasure,
And a store of elfin melody from bird and droning
bee,
And thy sunny life is laden with the gifts I may not
measure,
There is nothing good to gather from my poverty for
thee.'

Said the Moorland to the Woodland "I will wait a
little longer
Till the chestnut-shells are breaking and the frost
begins to bite,
Till the North wind growls and mutters with a note
that's ever stronger,
And the flush of summer passes in the waning of
the light.

When thy ferns are old and withered and thy scented
flowers are dying,
And thy spirit droops in sorrow for the glories that
depart,
And yellow leaves and broken hopes across the world
are flying,
It may be they will come to ask a shelter of my
heart."

GIPSY SOULS

THERE is a secret brotherhood, whose rules
Are never framed, whose watchword is unknown,
Whose dogmas flourish not in learned schools,
Whose creed is but a precept to disown
The wisdom of a world that names them fools ;
A band where brother scarce encounters brother
But treads the maze alone,
Doubtful of life's enrichment with another
To share his thought, bruised in the human press,
And as the roving wind companionless.

But, here and there, two kindred dreamers meet,
And straightway learn to talk the common tongue,
And wake strange fancies from their dim retreat,
And know the throb of hearts sublimely young
Moving together with responsive beat,
And murmur bars of old forgotten ditties
That all their tribe have sung
Since the good days before the birth of cities

Had made the godly, new, commercial man,
And scared abroad their dwindling caravan.

For they are born the children of a race
Furnished on earth with no abiding home;
Whose dreams fly out to ask a dwelling-place
Of shifting desert sands, of ocean foam;
Who build up castles on a sun-beam base,
And gather unregarded bloom of pleasure
As o'er life's field they roam,
Rating above the hoards of valued treasure
That one rare thing no garnered gold has bought,
True freedom shrined in palaces of thought.

The wealth that others heap they seldom win:
Titles and triumphs and the world's applause
But rarely prove their guerdon. When the din
Of battle rages round some hopeless cause
A fierce quixotic impulse sweeps them in
To fight and fail. Not theirs the prophet's thunder,
The statesman's marble laws,
The zealot's power to tear old faiths asunder
And flash new altar-flames, nor theirs to tell
The meaning of our life, its Heaven and Hell.

They make no organ-music, yet they sing
Sweet, haunting songs that simple hearts will hear,
Like the faint bells whose lonely voices ring
Through dusk-veiled silence o'er a frozen mere,
Unheeded, save by children wandering
In leafless lanes, or homeward-faring peasants,
Or large-eyed, anxious deer,
That watch beneath gaunt branches, where the pheasants,
Curtained by mists aflush with frosty light,
Crow their last challenge to the winter night.

The strange and subtle magic charms a few
That plumb their meaning, though the rest be blind,
That own the spell, mysterious, vital, new,
Of Nature's elemental voice behind
Their work, whate'er its shape. For, as the dew
Distils, a virgin essence, from the sources
Obscure and undefined
That feed the rolling flood of cosmic forces,
They draw their power direct, and in the flow
Of universal ether come and go.

Knights errant, looking for a lost crusade,
Toilers that weave the moonshine of Romance,
They sow for other's harvesting, repaid
With flowers and wreaths and ribands, or a glance
From eyes that fling the laughter of a maid.
Nor are they deaf to any music wooing
Their feet towards the dance ;
And all they do is for the sake of doing ;
And all they hope, to taste one brimming glass
Beside life's board before the bottle pass.

And though the tragic irony, that reigns
O'er this grim world, too often lays its hand
To bind their souls in uncongenial chains,
With herded serfs, who may not understand
Their lightest thought, blood flows within their veins,
A stream no drought can dry, no frost can harden,
And flowers from fairy-land
Make their cold prison like a perfumed garden,
And soft, salt winds from moaning seas caress
The unchanging children of the wilderness.

They glide like shadows through the trailing years,
Their voice a cry from an eternal Past.
Their laughter floats across a wave of tears ;
They play with all the passions, and are cast

Into Love's furnace of delights and fears;
But Hope's brave banner, on the tide of Sorrow,
Floats proudly from their mast.
They lose not Yesterday, yet win To-morrow;
And, where the golden sunset flames afar,
They seek their haven in an unborn star.

A BAD DAY

Sorrow! I would that thou and I might part;
But, since this may not be,
At least there is one fortress in my heart
That shall not fall to thee.
For there the host of my beleaguered Dreams
Guard with their dented swords
The flag that o'er the gateway floats and gleams
To mock thy brooding hordes.

Fancy, that no enfeeblement dismays;
Thought, that no wound can kill;
Old, armoured Memories of cloudless days,
And stern, unyielding Will;—
Though I must bend before thy poisoned breath,
These will surmount the strife,
And hold, until the last assault of Death,
The sacred joy of Life.

AN ENCOUNTER

The soft, warm dusk was full of whispered sounds;
Grasshoppers chirped unseen; on lonely peaks
The rose of sun-light turned to purple; gloom,
Kind, griefless gloom blotted the drowsy trees
And cloaked the valley's slumber-laden face.
Alone upon the climbing, rock-strewn path
That scarred the mountain's bosom, till it lost
Its coiling length among the stunted firs,
Massed, like the squadrons of a waiting host,
Beneath the sheltering crags, I bathed my soul
In scented, dream-like stillness; and I heard
Only far village-voices murmuring,
The clang of muffled cow-bells, and the roar
Of the white, weary water-fall that hung
Suspended like Prometheus on his rock.

Gliding across the wavelets of the wind
Was breathed the phantom of a human sigh,
The semblance of a sob; and, vaguely girt
With shadowy, floating draperies of mist,

Swam to me through the darkness a pale form
Whose feet would scarce have echoed o'er the sound
Of snow-flakes in the night. A woman's face
Flickered a mournful glance to meet my look
Of startled questioning. I have not known
Such a strange woman, with her weird, wild eyes,
Like burnt-out hearths, where the last glow of hope
Fitfully gleamed. Mysterious lines of thought
Were as the foot-prints of remembered tears,
Scars of a fiery past. No mortal life
Could hold the tale of passion printed there.
For not one brief existence, but the course
Of ancient races through long tracts of time
Were compass wide enough for all the load
Of aspirations, agonies, desires,
Torn dreams, and withered visions, that had made,
Within the framework of encircling hair,
A haunted walk for the anguish of the world.

The dark mouth moved; like the low, hopeless notes
Monotonously murmured to the hush
Of straining hearts, when some musician draws
His bow in brooding slowness o'er the strings
That ache with melody, her voice began
Listless, half-chanted, unpreluded speech.
"You know me, wandering stranger. You are one

Whose heart has felt the fire I kindled. Here
The child of mountain-hopes, of stern rock-dreams,
Cradled among the crags of Dauphiné
And nursed in Alpine breezes, was I born.
I am the spirit that opened Heaven and Hell.
I am the Revolution. Ah! how bright
Those first young hours, with their delirious thoughts
Dancing up to the world of white and blue,
The virgin snow beneath the virgin sky,
Where only monitory evening gave,
From time to time, the sun's foreboding flush,—
Passionate, blood-steeped red. Along the land,
The dark, sad suffering land, enslaved and chained,
My message leaped like yonder torrent, fed
From slowly-moving glaciers of despair,
Till the sound grew to thunder, wakening
Exhausted, swooning Hope. And, fortified
By her long sleep, Hope sprang into the day,—
Hope, such as never thrilled your loftiest dreams;
Not the poor, patient spirit whose rushlight serves
To darken Fortune's darkness, but a God,
Turbulent, jubilant, painting all gold
The world's dull copper, seen through sun-lit waves.
How my heart sang when drooping nations woke
To hear my voice of freedom. First the cry
Quivered through France; but soon the burden surged

Beyond her borders, like a trumpet-call
Blown from a mountain-fortress to be tossed
From crag to crag, and linger faint and long
In far-off dreaming valleys. Europe rose,
And felt the throb of fever move her blood,
And looked towards the stars with frightened eyes
And loose-lipped, anxious mouth. She caught my hands
Held out to her in blessing, for a sign
Of love, joy, peace, I purposed to impart,
And drew me to her bosom till our lips
Met burning. And the fever leaped and raged
Like fire from vein to vein; and we were mad.
When the delirium passed, pale, breathless, dazed,
I looked, half-conscious, at my once white hands,
And woke,—and woke—and saw them—oh! my God!—
The stain is on them yet."

Her lifeless voice
Flashed up with over-mastering agony
And, wailing, died into the whispered moan
Of hard-drawn breath. She cowered upon her knees
With suppliant arms, whose shaded pallor gleamed
Under the cloud of dark and copious locks
From the head sunk there for refuge. Though the gloom

Veiled her dim hands, yet lingered light enough
To show them in their coated varnish damned,—
The accusing rust of blood. There was a pause,
A living silence, shaken with the throb
Of passionate pulses that beat in the waves
Of lukewarm air, and quivering with the sigh
Breathed by voluptuous night. The phantom raised
At last her bending head. With eyes where woke
The interrogating anguish that would seek
Something unfound, she mutely scanned the void
Skyward, oblivious of my presence. Soon
The murmured, pleading accents droned anew.

"What scented flower survives from all the seed
I cast abroad? What hope that has not failed?
What misery from the universal weight
Of sorrow dies? Inevitable doom
Darkens the world-wide prospect. Now as then
Man is enslaved by man, and human hearts
Are fettered to the turning chariot-wheels
Of brutish toil and poverty and despair;
Still live the lies of fashion, the false creed
Of cramped convention, the benumbing power
Of social prostitution, and the lust,
The fetish of the golden idol. Men
Fear freedom with its price of glorious grief

More than the slow corruption and decay
Of vulgar aspirations, dwarfed ideals,
Comfort, and cowardice, and servility.
My light is darkened, and my burning dreams
Grow pale in the dominion of the sun.
I have no answer from the blinded stars,
The cold and cruel beauty of the moon,
The sob of egoist ocean, or the sigh
Of fancied sorrow from the sensuous wind.
I thought the world was wakened, and it growled
One drunken curse, and whispered in its sleep."

Again was silence. Then her upturned gaze
Drooped from the infinite vastness, till it touched
The mountain-racked horizon, and, drawn down,
Hovered upon the waning patch of gold
Behind the purple crest that cloaked the path
Of fiery coursers, with the car of day
Bearing the new white dawn. The fading blue
Blended with fading yellow and turned to green,
A mystic veil transparent to the light
Of one majestic, solitary star,
There radiant, a jewel seen through gauze.
She swept the tumbled tresses from her brow ;
And, with clasped hands and quivering eye-lids, flung
Her voice across the shrouded valley, fierce

In agonised intensity of pain.
"Oh western star, dear emblem of all peace!
Like the white soul of a world-weary nun,
Serene, aloof, in the sequestered calm
Of hoary cloisters, where the throb of life
Fades without echo, thou dost symbolise
A pure and passionless hope. At last I hear
Harmony where was discord. Peace and death
Must walk the human labyrinth hand in hand,
Comrades inseparable. While the world lasts
No one shall read its riddle, and they who hope
To salve its wounds with comfortable words,
To frame the final and millennial code,
The last utopian creed, are doomed to win
Failure, that thorny crown of all great souls.
But the world gains with every broken heart
A further step. Till the untameable brood
Of him who ravished from the guardian gods
The fire of aspiration and revolt
Are blotted from life's book, humanity
Will yet be marching with tumultuous strength
Towards the elusive, legendary land
Where the great answer lies—"
Her low voice broke.
She sighed one wordless message to the star,
Then passed into the curtained hall of Night.

AN AFTER-GLOW

Thus to meet
In the noisy street,
To pass in silence with a furtive glance!
Autumn is early on the town; her breath
These poor smoke-blackened branches withereth;
Ah me! and the dead leaves dance.

Once afar
The flame of a star
Wooed us to voyage on a doubtful sea.
We gained the sheltered garden on the shore,
And plucked Love's inmost fruit. There was no more
Untasted by you and me.

Clouds of wrath
Have hidden the path
Where then we wandered to our lost delight.
Whose was that mocking laughter over-head?
Are we not even faithful to the dead?
How blurred are the lamps to-night!

APOLOGIA

Do you complain of the torrent of rhyme
  Set to the tune of so mournful a measure,
Ask for a bard who will quicken the time,
  Warble of sunlight and laughter and leisure,
Sharpen his pen for impersonal themes—
  Plenty, you hold, may be had for the choosing—
Cease to interpret lugubrious dreams
  Ugly as Sin, and not half so amusing?

Well, you have reason. But, just for a space,
  Let us endow, ere I answer your question,
You with the part of a poet—disgrace
  Hardly can follow so mild a suggestion.
Turn from your sacred, ennobling pursuits,
  Luxury, wealth, notoriety, fashion,
Fall to the level of folly that shoots
  Arrows of song at a target of passion.

Picture yourself as a person who rakes
Dust-bins of life for a possible jewel :
Forges the metal of moonshine, and takes
Anguish and fancy and hope for his fuel :
Strains to a load of unresting desires,
Nerves that are tortured and pulses that tingle
Bleeds and is buffeted, labours, aspires :
Reaps what he sowed, in this harvest of jingle.

Then would you find in the waters of song
More than an image, a ghost, a reflection,
Shade of the passions whose turbulent throng
Calls for an outlet in colour and action ?
Ah ! if the temporal world could supply
Answers complete for the questions eternal !
Song is the thwarted idealist's cry,
Art is the nutshell, but *Life* is the kernel.

Would you be moved to the stringing of rhymes,
Cage your poetical gas in a metre,
During those rare, unforgettable times
When the mere art of existence is sweeter ?
Where does the volume repose on your shelves
Half so absorbing as joys we have tasted,
Definite, perfect, complete in themselves,
Hours of delight when no moment was wasted ?

Music of hounds in the green of the gorse;
  Dance of a boat on the jubilant billows;
Long, easy stride of your favourite horse;
  Splash of the trout feeding under the willows;
Throb of a valse in a ball-room at night;
  Hush of a woodland in hot summer day-time;—
These are the ballads no pen can indite,
  Always unwritten, the poems of play-time.

Wordless that wonderful lyric you know;
  Tremble of stars in the silence above you,
Eyes through the curtain of darkness aglow,
  Lips faintly breathing the whisper, "I love you";
Tumult of blood in the warmth of a face
  Kissed through a net-work of locks that are straying,
Bosoms enfolded and arms that enlace;
  Risky the game? Well, the better worth playing!

No; when these golden phenomena fade,
  Epilogue ended and company flitting,
Tragical, comical puppets that played,
  Hoarse and begrimed, in the gloom we are sitting.
Dead are the fleeting impressions that own
  Gas-light and paint fundamental as factors,
Leaving us stripped, unromantic, alone,
  Merely a troupe of impoverished actors.

Then an unsatisfied spirit awakes,
Racked with the old indefinable yearning,
Parched with a thirst no philosophy slakes,
Tries, in the language that passion is learning,
All its importunate wants to explain,
All its vague dreams and illusions to capture,
Marvel you much if the burden of pain
Slightly predominates over the rapture?

Now you are answered. Go back to your life.
Gain, if you can, from it perfect contentment.
Roll up your money. Make love to your wife.
March under Fate without fear or resentment.
Waste not your humorous pity on those
Poor slighted poets who earned your derision.
You have prosperity, plumpness, and prose;
They their ridiculous songs,—and the Vision.

A PIANIST

Flabby, effeminate, sensual face ;
Horrible hair
Tossed and disordered with negligent care
That cannot attain to the crowning grace
Of a comb, or the self-respect of soap ;
Eyes that swim in
A watery ocean
Of nerveless, fibreless, flaccid emotion,
Where weak thought-tentacles grope.
Look at the crowd of hysterical women !
Surely Nature, evolving her plan,
Yearned for a joke when she drafted *him* in !
Call such a creature a *man !*
Was the Sculptor weary who modelled *his* clay ?
Hush ! he begins to play.

Ah ! those old passionate strains,
That plead and cry
From the throbbing heart of a time-worn, mystic land
Out there in the great grim plains,

Whose haunting sigh
Floats to the reticent mountain-chains
On either hand,
Guarding their secret from the tortured race
That moan their piteous prayers to the stony face,
Then pass and die.
Now is the panting music flooded
With all the harmonies of human life
And all the discords of terrestrial death.
Veins full-blooded,
And worn-out, flickering breath,
Hope, sorrow, sensuality, and strife,
All the countless currents run
To meet and mingle and roll,
Voices transformed to the universal one
By the mood of a Master's soul.
The lights grow faint in the dusky hall,
And shadowy folds of gloom
On the silent faces fall,
While, out of their earthly tomb,
Wrapt, ghostly souls to each other call,
Feeling their way by the threads of sound
Through blended chords to the common ground
Of strange communion,
And fade into one mysterious union,

Super-sensual, transcendental,
Rite whose corporeal Pontifex
On earth is that impulse elemental
Forged on the anvil of sex.
With interchange of sorrow and joy,
With equal memories, equal hopes,
We shake off the personal alloy
And melt into the Soul that gropes
For a way on the misty slopes,
In an airy kingdom of wordless thought,
Where the definite dreams of the mortal mind
Are sparks, through our various senses caught
From the unknown Flame behind.

And now that our waves have flooded beyond the fence
Of the region thought can conquer or words explore,
We strike on the note of each separate carnal sense
Taking its place in the huge orchestral roar.
For the seeming ocean of billowy, confluent sound
Changes and passes and fades like a stormy sky,
Till we wake in a dumb, dark land enfolded and bound
By a network of woven scents; and the wondrous cry
Of harmony calls in the fragrance of dewy flowers,

Wafting unseen their odours across the hush
Of airless, infinite space and eternal hours,
Breathing the burden of garden-beds aflush
With all the blossoms, and more, that ever were known,
Each one filling a place on the perfect scale,
Each one yielding exact the requisite tone
Till the voice is again complete. And the endless tale
Is touched by the change of an organ-stop, and runs
Away to the language caught from eloquent suns
On a sounding-board prismatic, and soon we float
In a symphony drugged with colour, where every note
Swells the luminous octave of haunting hues,
Magical fusions of yellows and reds and blues
In a warm diaphanous haze, whose quivering chords
Flash like the sun-dyed sparkle of jewelled swords.

But the threads unite at an open door ·
And we pass to the Temple's inmost shrine,
With a golden pavement of stars for a floor,
And a roof where the tangled lightnings twine,
And all that we ever have known or felt,
That the mind can pierce or the fancy dream,
Grows paler and frailer than mist, to melt
In the solvent fervour of Light supreme.

For scent and colour and sound and taste
Blurr no longer the crystal plane
Where diamond points of fire have traced
Figures worked out in the over-brain,
Lore of the mystical secrets taught
In lines symbolic that bend and swerve
Through a winding coil of the purest thought,
Circle and pyramid, cone and curve,
Pattern and proof of the cosmic heart,
Calculus-print of the final scroll,
Sum of all science and worship and art,
Infinite, perfect, eternal whole.

Awake?
Are we only *here?*
The floor seems rocking, the windows shake
In the hurricane-clatter these madmen make,
As they thump and thunder and cheer.
My brain still clangs like a bell.
Who was the conjuror wove the spell?
That grotesque little mannikin facing
The flushed, convulsed, tempestuous hall,
Jerking his pantomine bows, grimacing,
Peacock-strutting at every call,
Can *he* have bewitched us all?

Well, it is something gained to know
That the pitiless bars of this earthly school
Will open at times for a holiday,
Where the long-pent dreams of a fool
May gush from the fountain and over-flow.
Ah. I must carry my thoughts away
Into the dark and the cool.
Let me go !

A GHOST

THE gas-lamp drives a toil-worn gleam
Through the clouded window-pane;
Like a mouse that gnaws on an oaken beam
Is the dull, dead drip of the rain;
And into the hush of my darkened dream
Echoes your voice again.

The fire leaps up, and the fancy dies,
And the secret, unconfessed,
Passes away with your burning eyes,
And your mouth, and your stormy breast.
Now we are sober and cold and wise;—
But the foolish days were the best.

THE APPOINTED LOT

Her face might well have stirred the gossip town,
Gaining their idle verdict whose report
Is beauty's palm and patent: while the crown
Of art imperial, and the rich renown
Of poet, painter, scholar, might have been
Hers, had Fate suffered her to act the queen
And granted her a court.

But, where the brown and ragged up-land shields
A lonely village-folk, her fortune shares
The life of them that labour in the fields,
The simple stage a cramped horizon yields,
Whose drama seldom varies, but employs
Her brain with humble duties, hopes, and joys,
And trivial household cares.

She needs no world of culture to explain
The shallow rule by which it loves or loathes,—
Her music is the murmur of the rain,
Her pictures are in plough-land, copse, or lane,
And, hearing through her haunted soul the cry
Of genius, with a smile—and half a sigh,
She mends her children's clothes.

SUBURBAN

A LANDSCAPE blistered with villas ; a frozen road
  Smooth, respectable, dreary, with asphalte edges
Like mourning borders,—the touch perfunctory owed
  By the shameless town, as it tramples on fields and
    hedges.

Flicker of cyclists, crouched in a shape grotesque,
  Through black fog stained with the grime of the
    crusted city ;
Beggars, by no tradition made picturesque,
  Pass out for a pirate cruise on the sea of pity.

Our old sweet pastoral dies in caricature.
  And yet even here, may the brooding soul discover
Beauty,—romance,—eternal, passionate, pure
  As a maiden blush and the first long kiss of a
    lover.

THE ROOK

Skirting the woodland brown,
  Where hangs the chill
Of the mists that flush to a fiery crown
  A-flame on the western hill,
Over the oozing fields of clay,
  Whose turf is sodden and soft, you fly,
Casting afar to the winter day
    Your raucous cry.

Are you a mortal bark
On life's grim sea,
Whose captain soul looks out through the dark
  To gauge what the night may be?
Tempest-buffeted, learning nought
  Of a kindred craft, where the squall has blown;
Alone on the rough, gray waste of thought,—
    Alone,—alone.

AN OPTIMIST

His old blue jersey, darned and patched:
The boots that he scarce could lace
For the yawning rifts in their leather, matched
The lines on his wrinkled face.
Though he hauled the sheet with a strong, brown hand,
And steered with a careful eye,
He was surely drifting on to the land
Where the hulks and the wreckage lie.

Down the tidal river ran the long sea-wall;
Beyond it, from the marshes, came the plaintive note
Of the wild-fowl, mingled with the rook's hoarse call,
Through the shadows and the silence to our lonely boat

In idle converse wrapped, the tale
  Of his varied life was told,
Picturing one foredoomed to fail,
  Who might gather, but could not hold.
But under the thin grey locks his cheek
  Had the radiant bloom of a child.
His past was barren, his future bleak ;
  Yet he talked of his hopes and smiled.

Oyster-catchers orange-billed went screaming by,
  Plovers wailed and fluted o'er the darkening land,
Breezy whispers reached us, like a mourner's sigh,
  Rustling through the reeds and sedge that crowned the sand.

For him the dream that never dies
  Loomed vague in the mist afar,
As he searched the world with sanguine eyes
  For the flare of a faded star.
Though withering frost had bowed his head,
  There was one clear thought in his brain ;
"I have had some luck in my time," he said,
  "And perhaps it will come again."

Moaning on the shingle now we heard the sea.
Grim the landscape lay below the sun-set aft.
Smiling still, he talked of golden days to be;
And weirdly through the gloom above a great gull laughed.

"NULLUM AMANS VERE"

I TAKE no solemn tone. The light diffused
Through the flushed dimness of your dainty room,
Shows me your eyes now mournful, yet amused,
And, curled as if in mockery of our doom,
Your dark mouth touched with the faint droop of sadness;—
Mouth that has moved so many hearts to madness.

Nothing is wholly serious where you dwell.
Yet vague and mystic sorrow seems to float
Through the low voice that like a silver bell
Rings plaintive, muffled music in you throat.
You sound a deep luxurious sea, whose waters
Flow from the tears of Life's more tragic daughters.

Grim Fate was tender, contemplating you,
And fairies brought their offerings at your birth;
You take the rose-leaf pathway as your due,
Your rightful meed the choicest gifts of earth.

On Fortune's placid pool is there one bubble
To blot your crystal with this flake of trouble?

Wealth, beauty, and the warmth of loving hearts,
  You have them to satiety, and repay
The sunshine with its own reflected darts:
  For bitter thoughts grow best where hopes decay,
And all the genial sweetness of a winner
Colours your course in life, dear gentle sinner!

Are you half conscious of some pale regret
  Haunting your soul, a baffled fugitive?
Under the opulent stream of all you *get*
  Lurks there a sigh for something more to *give?*
Love's wealth is loving, as your heart discovers,
A little lonely 'mid the crowd of lovers.

For love to you has been a wasteful fire,
  Not the slow, smouldering furnace that endures;
Each new great passion dies on its own pyre,
  Opening afresh the burning wound it cures.
Your resolution, faithful for a season,
Tenderly yields to the familiar treason.

In sun-burnt lands where weary exiles roam,
  Hearts worn with travail dream of English skies,
And, through their moon-beam memories of home,
  They hear your voice and see your radiant eyes.

A burden for their days, an anguish nightly,
This old lost comradeship you shed so lightly.

And husbands, sharing with their lawful wives
  The neutral tint of calm domestic ways,
Will turn a backward look to their past lives,
  Missing the dead romance of other days.
Safe in their promised land they will regret you.
Men have not found it easy to forget you.

But are you yearning for a light above
  The gas-fed flame of conquest, power, success?
Here in the sumptuous banquet-room of love
  Does your heart ache for its own emptiness?
You have gained all except the one thing wanted—
The loss of all. Sweet friend, will *that* be granted?

THE SKY-LARK IN FOG

Imprisoned soul, look up! The shrill, tumultuous sound
Whirling, aspiring
Strangely through these dark folds wherein all eyes are bound,
Thy hope is firing.

Darkened as ours, the sight of such brave songster halts,
With no discerning
Of that transparent dome for whose illumined vaults
Veiled hearts are yearning.

He, poet, fool, who leaves the path of cautious birds,
Lost in the dun light,
Chasing a phantom thought through the vague mist of words,
Soars for the sunlight.

THE SQUIRE'S FUNERAL

Near the old stone church, 'mid the mounds where his forefathers sleep,
By the gates of his own green park,
Whither the soft air wafts the quavering voice of the sheep,
And the song of the thrush and the lark,
While warm spring sunlight glows on the bare, stooped circle of heads,
Through a flushed, hazy shroud in the west,
And eyes are dim with the tears that each artless mourner sheds,
They have laid him down to his rest.

Simple enough to sneer at notes by no sentiment wrought
To the new diapason and pitch,
At feudal power dethroned by the century's eager thought,
And the burial pomp of the rich.

Perhaps o'er the costly pall the shade of a contrast comes
With a chill and a catch of the breath,—
His long easy life—and the Hell over there in the slums!—
But both are the same to Death.

Now do we frown at all that fans the dead ember of caste,
The birthright of race or of clan,
The makeshift code that ruled for evil and good in the past
Through the toy-shop kingdom of man.
Time's rust corrodes the tools that have served us well for a day
And, vain though it be to regret
The crude, faulty joy of the life that is passing away,
Shall our hearts not warm to it yet?

For you may not cast it out, if the fire is in your blood
That is born of the wind and the sun,
Of the blue-veined river, with the wildfowl haunting its flood,—
Dominion of trout-rod or gun,

Of the brown hunting-days, and the dreamy mid-summer nights,
And seasons of harvest and hay,
Of red, frosty sunsets, and the flickering northern lights,
And the woods where the fox-cubs play.

Through the change and stir of life a brooding memory calls
For the hush of ancestral homes,
With old oil-pictures of sportsmen lining the panelled walls,
And an army of calf-bound tomes,
And curious drowsy odours afloat in the perfumed air,
That carry your thoughts through the gloom
Back to a ghostly world you have known in your dreams, and share
With your kindred dust in the tomb.

Your roots are plunged in it all where'er your exile may be, —
The throb of your blood will reply
To crisp, rustling corn-fields, and surge of the sap in the tree,
And the plaintive waterfowl's cry;

You are one with these whose lives grow forth from the parent soil,
To the bars of a rustic strain,
A slow Virgilian measure of laughter and tears and toil,
Till they end in the earth again.

THE BORDER-LAND

Suburban heath and timbered gardens crown
This outpost hill; behind me looms the town;
Before me spreads the country, veiled and brown.

Drifted and yellow, last year's leaves decay;
Stout buds announce new verdure on the way;—
To-morrow reproduces Yesterday.

What woven gold in yonder city's girth,
What short-lived joy on Nature's dreaming earth
Give to this border-world of ours a worth?

Only the beat of human hearts; the bond
Of Love; the chords that question and respond;
The wide horizon;—and the Hope beyond.

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